

DIETITIAN MAKES THE CASE FOR BREAKFAST



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Does breakfast for you mean a soft drink on the fly, or a candy bar a couple of hours into the morning?

"Your breakfast selection, or lack of it, could impact how you perform on the job or at school," says Judy Barbe, Western Dairy Council nutrition educator.

Here's what happens. Sugary foods, such as fruit, fruit juice, candy or a can of pop, eaten in place of a meal, causes a quick rise in blood sugar and energy levels. About an hour later, blood sugar and energy plummet, bringing on symptoms of hunger.

A balanced breakfast, containing sugar, starch, protein and fat, provides a sustained release of energy. Such a breakfast might be as simple and traditional as cereal with milk and fruit; as elaborate as the skillet breakfasts offered by restaurants specializing in breakfasts; or something totally untraditional, such as a bag of trail mix made with dried fruits, seeds and nuts, with a glass of milk.

"Breakfast skippers generally make up the lost calories, but fail to make up the nutrients they would have received in the morning meal," says Barbe.

Most breakfast studies are done with children and these studies show that eating breakfast makes for better students.

"Numerous studies confirm that eating a good breakfast makes for better grades, better scores on achievement tests and better classroom behavior," Barbe says.

- Harvard Medical researchers reported that children who participated in school breakfasts improved math scores a full letter grade, behaved better, both with classmates and adults; and were less likely to be anxious or depressed.
- A State of Minnesota study found that breakfast-eaters raised their math and reading scores, were more attentive, better behaved, and made fewer visits to the nurse's office.

"School lunches were born after World War II,

when the U.S. Army discovered many of its recruits were malnourished. Now school breakfasts have become a smart idea," Barbe says. "Studies show that as many as 30 percent of 8 to 13-year-olds do not eat a daily breakfast."

Barbe says school breakfasts, which provide about one-fourth of a child's daily nutritional needs, offer an alternative for kids who are not hungry when they first wake up, and for families with two wage-earners, where morning is a rush time and breakfast may get short shrift.

"In short-term studies, children who skip breakfast are less attentive and less able to discriminate details," she says. Hungry students score lower on achievement tests and other measurements of academic performance, and they also do not perform as well in sports.

"Breakfast provides the energy children need to concentrate and accomplish classroom tasks," says Barbe. "After a night of fasting, breakfast eliminates such transient hunger symptoms as headache, fatigue, sleepiness, restlessness and decreased attentionspan – all detriments to successful test-taking."

Across the country, 75 percent of schools that offer school lunches also offer school breakfasts. The Rocky Mountain states vary in how completely they have embraced the concept of school breakfasts. Idaho, where 97 percent of schools participate, ranks 5th among the states. New Mexico is 12th, Arizona 23rd, Utah 35th, Colorado 39th, Montana 45th and Wyoming, with 51 percent of schools participating, ranks 46th in the nation.

"Colorado, which has been one of two states in the nation that relied solely on federal funds and did not fund school meal service at the state level, included \$2.5 million for school foodservice in this year's school funding bill," says Barbe. "That funding will help schools offer this valuable service to our children. As educators have long known, hungry children do not learn."

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